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ABSTRACT

In response to the glut of communication degree holders in a time of rapidly diminishing demand for teachers and the subsequent need for alternative careers in communications, the department of speech and theatre at an Arkansas university developed a one-semester internship program for seniors in communications. The program began with students gaining hands-on experience with cameras, audio equipment, lighting, and control room duties in local television and radio, and was broadened to include speech communication and theatre, with placement in management of community theatre, television marketing, public relations, and personnel. The program encountered problems in the areas of expectations of the "real world" management, the quality of work for the student at the site, and the development of internships in new areas. A statement of goals was thus devised, in contract form, to be drawn up by the students with the help of the on-site director and approval of a faculty advisor. It included a course listing showing the students' area of proficiency, and has since proven adequate for most internship arrangements. Development of the internship program has led to growth in the number of nonteaching degree graduates in communication, reflecting the expectations of the public that students should be educated both in the values of knowledge and in practical competence and productivity. (A copy of the internship contract is included.) (HTH)

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THE PROBLEM OF INTERFACING THE ACADEMIC AND BUSINESS WORLDS: INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS IN COMMUNICATION

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THE PROBLEM OF INTERFACING THE ACADEMIC AND BUSINESS WORLDS: INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS IN COMMUNICATION

The Speech Communication Association through the encouragement of the Association for Communication Administration has developed an extensive amount of material on the approaches toward alternative careers for speech communication majors.[1] The market for baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degrees has long been viewed as primarily centered in teaching and research related careers. With the glut of degree holders in a time of rapidly diminishing demand for teachers, other career directions had to be explored, so the SCA and ACA undertook the task of studying the problem and finding alternative careers. The list of opportunities reflects a broad spectrum of career choices in such fields as business, social work, government, and professional areas of medicine, law and educational administration.[2] Once the alternative career opportunities have been identified, it is the responsibility of the colleges and universities to implement programs that prepare students to take advantage of those opportunities. This paper will focus upon the author's experiences in dealing with the business world as attempts have been made to develop alternative career opportunities for graduating bachelor degree holders.

The Department of Speech and Theatre Arts in the University of Central Arkansas is organized around the three areas of speech communication, theatre, and mass communication. Students majoring in the Department are awarded one of three baccalaureate degrees (BA, BS, BSE) in speech and theatre arts upon graduation. A senior level student may

opt for an internship in one of three areas of the Department during the final semester of work.

The intern program was initiated seven years ago primarily in the area of mass communication. The program was started as a tutorial arrangement with three hours credit awarded under "special problems" in the student's curriculum. The first three years of the program were confined to the "honors" type student and the "special studies" was an overload assignment for the faculty. An average of three students per year were in the field during those first three years working in commercial and educational television and radio in the central Arkansas area. Their work usually was in production type of tasks such as hands on experience with cameras, audio equipment, lighting, and control room duties. Upon Completion of the semester, a paper describing the experience in the view of the student was submitted. The faculty director of the study consulted with the station personnel who had observed the student in the station for purposes of evaluation of the project and determination of a grade to be awarded. The procedures for selecting the student, placing the student, working with the broadcast station as a joint venture, and evaluating the project and student were worked out over the period of time as we went along. With few changes, these are the steps we follow to the present day.

The major change from those earlier days has been to broaden the intern program to include internships in speech communication and theatre. Commencing in 1976 with a course entitled Internship in Communications having been added to the curriculum, we offered opportunities to those students in speech communication and theatre for field work to prepare them for careers other than teaching. From that time to the present, we have had students interning in the organizational

structure of the Campus Crusade for Christ, management of a community theatre, and marketing department of an ABC-TV affiliate. In addition, we have placed students in public relations and personnel offices of area manufacturing companies, newsrooms of area television and radio stations for a total of twenty-three interns during the past four years. We view these last four years as years of progress, but they were years of work in overcoming several discouraging barriers at times. Three particularly difficult problems to be confronted were the expectations of the "real world" management, the quality of work for the student on-site, and the development of internships in new areas.

When management in the business world are approached about the possibility of opening their office doors to students, they usually respond in one of three ways. First, they see the program as a positive factor in their business and are willing to have an intern. Second, the proposal of having a student looks good to them, but they haven't done this before and would like to have some time to consider it. Third, they do not want to be bothered with it. Ordinarily, the business person with experience in the area of intern programs will have a fairly good idea of what is expected of his organization in furthering the education of the student. He knows the academic world expects the student to have the opportunity of engaging in applying the theories and practices that have been studied in lecture and seminar. The business world offers that opportunity. The problem arose in what type of activity was proper for the student, and how much of it should be done. The student needed to be somewhat skilled and knowledgeable in the area to be of help on the job and yet lacking in certain skills and knowledge to offer the challenge of on-the-job

training. It was not enough just to observe, but questions should be asked and basic tasks should be carried out during the intern period. A balance between learning by observation and affective learning was to be developed for the student. In addition, the need to equate time on the job with class contact hours for credit to be awarded was to be worked out. All of the questions evolved out of the first years of the internship programs of the Department. Each question and set of problems were addressed as they arose, so that a contract came about which attempted to formalize the conditions of the internship and responsibilities of the parties to the contract. Figure one is an example of the contract.

The goals statements give a basis for understanding between the university and the off-campus institution as to what is desired and expected in the program. The goals are stated in terms of cognitive objectives and behavioral objectives, therefore, the interfacing of university academic expectations and the business world's desire for training people is accomplished. Finally, these goals statements are formulated by the student with the help of the on-site director of the experience and with approval of the faculty advisor.

The method or design in the internship is formulated in terms of what is to happen on-site and how much contact time will be available to the student. For instance, the description of method would be to say, "The intern is to spend no fewer than ten hours per week in the newsroom of KQQ-TV working with the copy rewrite person preparing the 6:00 P.M. news program." The ten hours would be identified as blocks of time or hours distributed over a number of days in the week. The description might contain specific reference to duties to be carried out during the time on-site. Usually, specific duties are left for

INTERNSHIP IN COMMUNICATIONS (4367)

(Credit for this course is not included for the major 36 hours, nor is it to satisfy the departmental twelve hours in upper division.)

Student Name_____Phone_____

Address_____

Type of Internship: (circle one) Speech Theatre Broadcasting

Classification at time of internship: ☐ 1st sem. sr. ☐ 2nd sem. sr.

Goal(s) for intern work:_____

_____

_____

_____

Method or design for carrying out the internship:_____

_____

_____

Name of on-site director of internwork:_____

Business Adress of on-site director:_____

Phone:_____Signature of approval_____
on-site director

_____

_____approval _____disapproval

Signature of faculty advisor_____

Comments:_____

_____

_____approval _____disapproval

Signature of Chairman_____

Course Listings that support this study:

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

later addition to the contract if their inclusion is warranted under comments by the faculty adviser. Comments by the faculty adviser will contain the deadlines to be met for submitting the descriptive and evaluative papers and the number of on-site visitations by the adviser if appropriate.

The inclusion of courses that have been taken in the student's curriculum which support the internship is for the purpose of informing both the on-site director and the department chairman that the student has had sufficient indoctrination to succeed in the internship. This course listing evolved as a part of the contract when problems arose with students in the field who were ill prepared for the experience. By having the student list the courses, the department could be more certain that those students who were in the field would not become an embarrassment to themselves and the university.

The three semester hours of credit awarded for successful completion of the internship is not included in the total major hours, nor does it count for the required senior level hours in the major. These two exclusions were drafted as a response to instances when students decided to withdraw from the internship before completion, or the business agency was unable to continue with the student due to internal changes of the organization. In the latter case, the on-site director took employment elsewhere, and the agency had no one to replace him immediately who had an interest in continuing the relationship with the student. When these circumstances arose either on the student's part or a problem with the business agency, we had problems with the student's plans for graduation. It was a lesser problem when initiated withdrawal was the student's decision, but the grounds for complaint are apparent if the student could not graduate for reasons beyond his

control.

For the majority of intern experiences, this form is adequate in serving as a contractual agreement on terms for all parties involved. We use the contract as a basis of discussion when we go to new business areas for possible expansion in opportunities for internships. The business individual who has not had any experience with the program or anything like it is usually cautious about entering into a working relationship until he is satisfied that the program will not be a detriment to his organization. Usually there are two lines of questioning that are followed when we go into a new area. The first is the doubt that they have the personnel who would be interested or competent to handle the responsibility of on-site director. We attempt to allay these concerns by pointing out that the program is very selective in placing students with a company and its people. A copy of the contract is shown to them and it is explained that the ground rules for the internship are developed by both the on-site direct and the student with approval of the faculty adviser. The expectations are beyond either or both parties., and they cannot be mediated, then the process of identifying someone else in the company as on-site director or going to another company is implemented. These explanations usually will satisfy the doubting business man.

The second line of questions follows the more pragmatic elements of what contributions to the business organization can the manager expect from the intern. Again, the contract is referred to as the document containing the expectations of the on-site director as company representative, and that the student has been selected on the basis of certain competencies he possesses for that level and type of task. The on-site director is encouraged by the faculty director to identify

and, indeed, insist upon a standard of performance by the intern, so the company management can feel confident that their operation will not be hampered by the intern's presence in their organization.

In conclusion, the experience in developing the internship program at my university has led to a growth in non-teaching degree graduates in speech communication, theater, and mass communication. This is a healthy trend, in my opinion, because we are reflecting the general expectations of the population that support higher education in my state. That is, primarily, to educate a young person not only in terms of the inherent values to be found in gaining knowledge, but to prepare the individual to be competent, productive and a contributing citizen in our society. The bottom line, to borrow a phrase from the business world, is the improvement in FTE realized by initiating the internships in the department, and this is always good news when funds are appropriated for support of departmental programs.

END NOTES

[1]Progress Report Task Force on Career Opportunities, Spectra (April, 1980), p. 13

[2]Speech Communication and Careers, brochure prepared by the Executive Committee of the Association for Communication Administration.